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AUTHOR Mohan, Donna K.
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ABSTRACT

A systematic method for evaluating the presentation skills of volunteer trainers would enable the discovery of hidden problems. It would also increase individual trainer skills and satisfaction and improve the overall effectiveness of the training program. A first step is to determine the general presentation skills a successful volunteer trainer should have. The purpose of trainer evaluations should be to determine the trainer's level of development and prescribe necessary help to improve in the areas where skill is lacking. Volunteers should also be asked the qualifications/characteristics they think are needed and be allowed to rank them themselves. Perhaps the most useful assessment is a self-evaluation in which volunteer trainers assess their own strengths and weaknesses. In addition to a periodic self-evaluation, examples of other forms helpful in evaluating platform or presentation skills are evaluations by peers, participants, and the trainer's supervisor. Results of evaluations can be used to develop a personal self-improvement plan. (This report includes forms for self-evaluation, standard evaluation, participant evaluation, peer evaluation, and supervisor's evaluation as well as a sample self-improvement plan form.) (YLB)

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EVALUATING PRESENTATION SKILLS OF VOLUNTEER TRAINERS

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EVALUATING PRESENTATION SKILLS OF VOLUNTEER TRAINERS

Much has been written about how to evaluate training programs, but not much has been said about how to evaluate training personnel, particularly regarding their presentation skills. As a director of training for a volunteer organization, I must concern myself with the training and development of a volunteer training corps numbering approximately seventy, all women. These trainers have a variety of backgrounds, and most need help in developing and improving their platform training skills. A systematic method for evaluating their presentation skills would enable the department to uncover hidden problems which may exist, increase individual trainer skills and satisfaction, and improve the overall effectiveness of the training program.

After beginning to research this topic, I discovered that one could easily spend several months writing, piloting, and revising evaluation forms and programs, and ultimately write a thick book on the topic. However, for the purposes of this paper, I will confine myself to discussing the general presentation skills a successful volunteer trainer should have, some of the many evaluation types which could be utilized in the volunteer training department, and what can be done once the evaluation results are gathered.

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD EVALUATIONS LOOK FOR?

After reading many lists on the desirable characteristics of an adult educator, I found that one of the best was written by an educator in the labor movement in 1933, Hilda Smith (Lenz, 1982, pg.7), who stated that teachers of adults should have:

> Knowledge of the subject and ability to communicate it
> Knowledge of teaching techniques
> Willingness to learn from the students and relate teaching

to their experience
Intellectual integrity
A broad cultural perspective free from prejudice
Interest in students as individuals and belief in their desire to learn
Warm, sympathetic personality
A sense of humor.

Coincidentally, the job description for the position of volunteer trainer includes almost the same wording: "the ability to work well with people of all ages, races, creeds and religious backgrounds; enthusiasm and a sense of humor."

While I wholeheartedly agree that these are the general characteristics I seek when recruiting a new trainer, I also expect that they will develop specific presentation skills as well. For example, are they able to:

Use time wisely and begin and end on time;
Ask appropriate questions and encourage participant questions and comments;
Speak clearly and use terminology that the learners will understand;
Be flexible enough to meet the specific needs of the participants, while still managing to adequately fulfill the objectives of the program?

Obviously, this list could go on and on, and not all trainers will be able to do all these things at all times. The purpose of trainer evaluations should be to discover where a trainer is in her development, and to prescribe the necessary help she needs to improve in the areas where she lacks skill.

As Malcolm Knowles points out (1970, pg. 43), "nothing makes an adult feel more childlike than being judged by another adult," and so it is with trainers. As the director of the training unit I have ideas of the qualifications I think the trainers should have, but they also have valid ideas about such matters. It would be better to ask them to list the qualifications/characteristics they think are needed, and

allow them to rank themselves to see where improvements are needed. (Much the way Knowles does for his theory of learning contracts.) In this way, they will be more deeply motivated to learn what they see the need to learn. (Knowles, 1970.)

WHAT KINDS OF EVALUATIONS TO USE?

In light of this, perhaps the most useful evaluation will be a self-evaluation in which the volunteer trainer assesses her own strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, I have designed a self-evaluation form to be completed periodically for the trainer's own use. (Figure 1.) Also included are sample evaluations to be used by peers, participants, and the trainer's supervisor. None of these forms was intended to be all-inclusive. Rather, they are examples of forms which would be helpful in evaluating volunteer trainers in a similar work setting with regard to their platform or presentation skills.

Merwin (1986, pg.48) provides a useful "Checklist for Questions in an Evaluation" which was used when forming the questions in the sample evaluations:

____ 1. Does this question ask for fine distinctions in scoring?
____ 2. Are there any words that load or color the question?
____ 3. Does this question ask for too quick a response to a complex area?
____ 4. Does this question ask for future knowledge?
____ 5. Are the assumptions underlying the question valid?
____ 6. Do the participants have the background to answer this question?
____ 7. Are all the terms used in the question clear?
____ 8. Is this question directly related to the seminar evaluation?
____ 9. Is there a clear basis for responding to this question?

Figure 1. Volunteer Trainer Self-Evaluation Form

FOR YOUR OWN REFLECTION...

To be completed periodically by each KTTGSC Trainer, in order to gain insights into your training strengths and weaknesses. You may want to discuss the results with your supervisor in order to work together on areas for improvement. However, you do not need to show this to anyone - it is for your own use and self-discovery.

Rate yourself using this scale: "I do/feel this..."

Comments: make notes to yourself, when appropriate.

Hardly ever	= 1
Occasionally	= 2
Sometimes	= 3
Frequently	= 4
Almost always	= 5

THINKING BACK ON THE TRAININGS I HAVE GIVEN LATELY...

1. *I was comfortable with my own knowledge and skill in the subject area.* ____
   Comments:

2. *I found out what the participants came to learn.* ____
   Comments:

3. *I directed the learners to additional resources, so they could supplement the information included in the workshops.* ____
   Comments:

4. *I showed an interest in each learner's concerns and tried to give all equal time to participate.* ____
   Comments:

5. *I gave the participants time to ask questions and make comments.* ____
   Comments:

6. *I spoke clearly and enthusiastically.* ____
   Comments:

7. *I tried to emphasize the positive, without being phony.* ____
   Comments:

8. *I remembered that not everyone is as committed to Girl Scouting as I may be.* ____
   Comments:

9. *To the extent that I could, I made sure the learners' physical needs were met.* ____
   (ie: seating, lighting, temperature, refreshments, breaks, distractions, etc.)
   Comments:

10. *I truly care about and believe in the topics I teach.* ____
    Comments:

11. *I kept on track and made sure we covered what the participants came to learn.* ____
    Comments:

12. *I felt well-prepared for the workshops I gave.* ____
    Comments:

13. *I got in touch with the co-trainer(s), if any, at least one week before the training, to discuss who would do what parts and other arrangements.* ____
    Comments:

Figure 1. continued

14. *I used different methods, including visuals (such as posters, video tapes, filmstrips, charts, etc.)* ____
    Comments:

15. *I made sure the visuals I used could be seen from the back of the room.* ____
    Comments:

16. *I included methods which gave the learners a chance to meet each other and move around the room.* ____
    Comments:

17. *I provided a "coffee box" and breaks.* ____
    Comments:

18. *I wore a nametag and had one for each of the participants.* ____
    Comments:

19. *I thought of myself as one of the group, rather than as "The Teacher."* ____
    Comments:

20. *I consider my strengths as a trainer to be....*

21. *I think I need more work on.....*

NOW WHAT?

If you had several "3's" those indicate areas where you should concentrate on improving your training techniques. With just a little more effort you should be able to turn those "3's" into "4's" and "5's."

If you had more that one or two "1's" or "2's," you should probably ask your supervisor for some help in those areas. These numbers may reflect items you didn't realize should be taken care of by the trainers.

If you had mostly "4's" and "5's" you should keep up the good work!

SELF-EVALUATION

The scale used on the self-evaluation form in Figure 1. (and also used in Figure 3.) was based on one used by Peter Renner in his Basic Training Skills workshop manual (1988.) The items are original, based on my own experiences and on my reading of the literature, especially Knowles (1970), Pike (1988), Langerman (1974) and Lenz (1982.) The typeface used for this form was "script" in order to make the form seem a little less impersonal. This form could be used immediately after a training presentation, although it is designed to be used on a periodic basis, while reflecting on several previous workshops. Another way to implement it would be to videotape the training and then review it with the form in hand.

Video technology can be quite useful in helping trainers evaluate themselves. In fact, that was one of the main justifications for the purchase of the video equipment by my agency, but unfortunately, not much has been done with it for that purpose so far. Knowing that they are being taped solely for the purpose of letting the trainers see themselves may help ease some of the nervousness that comes from being filmed. Most women react immediately to how they look and sound on camera and may not notice their training styles unless assisted by a form like Figure 1. Another advantage to using the video equipment is the ability to stop the action for a second or third look. This form of self-evaluation has much to offer for current and future use.

PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

Up to now, participant evaluation of trainers in my work setting has been limited to one question on the standard evaluation form shown as Figure 2. Unfortunately, item #7 really asks two questions:

Figure 2. Standard Evaluation Form

KEYSTONE TALL TREE GIRL SCOUT COUNCIL

EVALUATING TODAY'S TRAINING: _____

_____

_____

_____

1. Did you come to this training with specific ideas of what would be included?

   _____Yes _____No

   A. If so, what? _____

   B. Were these points covered? ___Not at all ___Some-what ___At times ___Quite a bit ___Very much

2. Do you feel this training gave you the information/help you need at this time in Girl Scouts?

   ___Not at all ___Some-what ___At times ___Quite a bit ___Very much

3. Was the course flexible enough to allow you to get your questions answered?

   ___Not at all ___Some what ___At times ___Quite a bit ___Very much

4. What do you consider to be the most important thing you learned today? _____

   _____

5. What you learned at the training that you can put to immediate use is: _____

   _____

6. What you learned about yourself today is: _____

   _____

7. Do you feel the trainer understood the material and presented it in a way you could understand?

   ___Not at all ___Some what ___At times ___Quite a bit ___Very much

8. As a member of the group, do you feel you contributed: ___Not at all ___Some what ___At times ___Quite a bit ___Very much

9. How do you feel the other members of the group contributed? ___Not at all ___Some what ___At times ___Quite a bit ___Very much

10. Your comments:

PT: 594

1) whether the participant feels that the trainer understood the material, and 2) whether the learner feels the trainer presented the material in a way he or she could understand. The feedback from this item has never been very helpful in indicating how well the trainer trains. Figure 3. would be more useful as a participant evaluation, mailed or distributed to some of the participants after a training. While not all of the participants need to answer all these questions at each training, some of these questions could be incorporated into the standard evaluation form used after each course.

In sharing the results of these participant evalauations with a trainer it would be wise to point out that unanimous "rave reviews" should not be the trainer's goal. Custer (1986) provides some suggestions to compare how a trainer measures up with other trainers. He suggests using feedback that can be converted into a numerical scale of 100. Using his system one determines the trainer's percentage score and compares it to this scale:

80 - 100 = Great
65 - 79 = Satisfactory
0 - 64 = Unsatisfactory

He cautions that if a trainer's rating is 90 or over, she should consider whether she isn't just entertaining the learners. As Lenz states (1982, pg. 67), "Charisma can often compensate for a lack of substance." One should also remember that different learning styles can affect how a particpant will rate the trainer, especially if the training was done in a style not shared by the participant. According to Knowles (1970), unless the negative reactions are more than 16% the trainer is probably doing fine.

Figure 3. Participant Evaluation Form

EVALUATING THE TRAINER

Please take a few minutes to help the volunteer trainer who presented this workshop improve his or her skills. Respond honestly to the following questions, based on your experience at the workshop you just attended. Just fill out this form and return it in the postage-paid envelope provided. Be sure to evaluate only one trainer on this from, even if there was a training team at this workshop.

Thank you for your time.

Workshop: _____ Date: _____

Trainer's name: _____

Using this scale, please comment as openly as possible. If you like, make additional comments in the space provided.

1 = hardly ever 2 = occasionally 3 = sometimes 4 = frequently 5 - almost always

1. The trainer made me feel welcome and comfortable at this training. _____
   Comments:

2. The trainer spoke clearly and loud enough for me to hear. _____
   Comments:

3. The trainer stayed on the topic and did not stray to other topics. _____
   Comments:

4. I felt comfortable asking questions and making comments because of the trainer. _____
   Comments:

5. The trainer's pace suited me. _____
   Comments:

6. The trainer seemed very knowledgeable about the topic of the workshop. _____
   Comments:

7. The trainer gave clear and easily understandable explanations and directions. _____
   Comments:

8. The trainer seemed to be rushing through the workshop. _____
   Comments:

9. The trainer was able to hold my attention. _____
   Comments:

10. Now that the workshop is over, I wish the trainer had...

11. I would recommend that a friend attend a workshop given by this trainer in the future:

    ___ yes, without hesitation ___ maybe ___ no, probably not

PEER EVALUATION

Peer evaluation may prove to be even more useful than participant evaluation, since the fellow trainer knows and understands the goals of the training, the methods available to be used, and the difficulties which a trainer can encounter, in spite of the best intentions and plans. Figure 4. is a sample peer evaluation based on Renner's work (1988). This evaluation would work especially well in the Girl Scout setting since the volunteer trainers are a very supportive and close-knit group. Criticism is often easier to take from a friend or close associate, and in this situation there is no threat of competition like there may be in another setting. (Once again, "script" typeface was used for a warmer touch.)

SUPERVISOR EVALUATION

The final form of evaluation considered is that done by a trainer's supervisor. This evaluation can be more technical than the others, and should indicate areas for improvement. Ideally, it would be used with the other evaluation data as a starting place to "rediagnose" (Knowles, 1970, pg.43) the learning needs of the trainer as a trainer. Learning is an on-going process, and certainly trainers should be willing to accept that concept. Figure 5. is a sample supervisor evaluation form, to be used to provide guidance to the volunteer trainer for improvement of presentation skills.

AFTER EVALUATING

"The basic purpose of evaluation is to stimulate growth and improvement." (Kempfer quoted by Knowles, 1970, pg. 223.) Unless the preceeding evaluations are used for further follow-up there

Figure 4. Peer Evaluation Form

PEER EVALUATION

From _____ *To* _____

On _____*(date) I observed you presenting the* _____

_____ *Workshop. Here are my thoughts ....*

When you began the session....

What impressed me most about your training style was....

Your strengths appear to be....

May I suggest that you....

The way you presented the information ....

The way you used the teaching aids ....

Your voice .....

Your eye contact and body language ....

Your interactions with the participants.....

May I suggest that you ....

I would like you to know.....

Figure 5. Supervisor's Evaluation Form

SUPERVISOR'S EVALUATION OF TRAINER

Trainer's name _____ Supervisor _____

Workshop observed _____ Date of observation _____

Presentation skills ratings:

5 = excellent 4 = above average 3 = average 2 = below average 1 = unsatisfactory

1. Apparent knowledge of subject _____
2. Ability to hold participants' attention and interest _____
3. Encouraged comments and questions _____
4. Ability to establish a warm, comfortable climate _____
5. Ability to stay on the subject _____
6. Use of time _____
7. Ability to use various training techniques as appropriate _____
8. Use of clear explanations and directions _____
9. Ability to use humor _____
10. Adaptability _____
11. Attention to needs of learners _____
12. Use of examples to illustrate concepts _____
13. Eye contact and body language _____
14. Preparation and use of visuals and other aids _____
15. Evidence of overall preparedness _____

Figure 5. continued

SUPERVISOR'S EVALUATION OF TRAINER (continued)

16. Apparent enthusiasm for subject _____

17. Use of questions _____

18. Clarity of presentation _____

19. Organization of presentation

20. Grooming and dress _____

21. Completeness of content (was curriculum fully covered) _____

Your strengths:

Your weaknesses:

Areas which need improvement: (urgent? or in the future?)

would be no reason to bother with them. Volunteer trainers have various motivations for doing what they do, but certainly the majority of them want to do a good job, and want to improve their skills. If effective evaluation took place the trainer should be able to identify how successful her training techniques were and any areas that need improvement (Merwin, 1981.) Results of evaluations can be used to develop a personal self-improvement plan as described by Miller (1979.) He sets forth three steps to include (pg. 19):

1. A statement of goals should list what improvements are desirable.
2. Procedures to achieve the goals should be carefully thought through and listed.
3. Some means of evaluation might be suggested to determine whether the goals were accomplished and to what degree.

Figure 6. is a sample self-improvement plan form which could be easily used when working with volunteer trainers. It is based on one designed by Miller (1979, pg. 21), but made user-friendly for volunteer trainers who may feel threatened by a formal learning contract.

CONCLUSION

Evaluation of presentation skills is an enormous, but worthwhile undertaking. If trainers are able to take a systematic look at their own skills, they may be able to see the areas they are particularly accomplished in and identify other areas for improvement. By choosing two or three areas for special attention they will not need to feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the job of being a volunteer trainer.

Figure 6. Sample Self-Improvement Plan Form

TRAINER'S SELF-IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Trainer's Name _____ Today's Date _____

Areas I would like to work on improving:

1.

Personal Objective:

2.

Personal Objective:

3.

Personal Objective:

Ways I will work on achieving my objectives, and time frame for doing so:

1.

When I will have reached this goal: Halfway point:

2.

When I will have reached this goal: Halfway point:

3.

When I will have reached this goal: Halfway point:

SELF-EVALUATION OF PERSONAL OBJECTIVES:

1.

2.

3.

Comments on self-improvement plan:

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